DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 477 CS 208 516

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TITLE Influencing Teacher Attitudes toward Teaching Writing as a Process Approach.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Workshops; Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; *Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS National Writing Project

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to test the impact of three summer writing workshops at one National Writing Project site on the participants' attitudes toward and approaches to teaching composition. Seventy-nine elementary school through college writing teachers who had participated in one of the three workshops were administered a pretest approximately one month prior to attending the workshop and a posttest on the final day of the workshop. The two parts of the test were based on descriptions of two hypothetical English teachers with differing philosophical positions about teaching composition. One teacher tended to emphasize the structure of discourse and its rhetorical characteristics, while the other tended to emphasize the process of composing. Subjects' scores were based on how closely their attitude and approach to teaching composition resembled those of one of the hypothetical teachers. Based on participant feedback, changes were incorporated into the workshops for the second and third summers. Variables in the analysis included workshop year, and pretest or posttest time. The results indicated that under certain conditions workshop participants did significantly and positively change their attitudes toward teaching writing as a process, and that the likelihood for change was increased by modifying the workshop methodology. (HTH)

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ED246477

Influencing Teacher Attitudes Toward Teaching Writing as a Process Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to test the impact of the summer writing workshops at one National Writing Project site on the participants' attitude toward and approach to teaching composition. The subjects were 79 writing teachers from metropolitan Atlanta schools and colleges who participated in one of three consecutive summer workshops. A standardized criterion-referenced test was selected to assess the results. A two-factor (year and time of testing) repeated measures analysis of variance was used to ascertain differences among the three groups. Results indicated that the difference between the pretest and posttest means was significant for the second workshop group, with the participants' attitude toward and approach to teaching composition showing greater emphasis on writing as a process after completing the workshop.

Influencing Teacher Attitudes Toward Teaching Writing as a Process Approach

Teacher attitudes appear to have a significant effect upon student learning. Rosenthal's (1968) research has shown that teachers' expectations or mental set tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies, while Gagné (1977) suggests that attitudes influence the choices of personal action made by an individual, thereby making the action more or less probable. Thus, it seems likely that the attitudes which teachers hold toward writing and the teaching of writing will influence their classroom approach to teaching writing.

Gere and Smith (1979) contend that teachers who view writing as a process of discovering and shaping meaning rather than in terms of the structure, style, and quality of the product can become more effective composition instructors. However, surveys of teacher practices (Applebee, 1981) indicate that many teachers appear to base their instruction on the latter rather than on the invention stages of the composing process. Since attitudes make actions more or less probable, one might assume that these teachers' attitudes toward teaching writing are not congruent with a process approach.

It might also be assumed that influencing their attitudes toward teaching writing as a process could improve their ability to implement classroom practices consistent with a process approach.

Using the Emig Teacher Attitude Scale, King (1979) demonstrated that experimental teachers trained in teaching writing as a process in the New Jersey Writing Project's summer institute viewed the teaching of writing differently than control teachers. Control teachers placed greater importance on correctness of spelling and grammar, a traditional approach, while experimental teachers placed greater importance on content and the act of composing.

In a follow-up study, Carroll (1979) found that students of teachers trained in teaching writing as a process approach showed significant and important increases in writing performance over students of teachers who did not receive this training. One might infer that the teacher attitude changes King noted were initial measures of the classroom behavior which Carroll observed.

Assuming attitudes are a priori measures of a teacher's classroom behavior, the present investigation was designed to determine the impact of training in teaching writing as a process on the participants' attitudes toward and approach to teaching composition and, secondly, to examine how changes in workshop methodology might affect participants' attitudes. The study was intended to answer the following two questions.

1. Do participants, after completing a summer writing workshop, significantly change their attitude toward and approach to

teaching composition by placing greater emphasis on writing as a process?

2. Does the application of certain conditions of learning to the workshop methodology influence the likelihood of change in attitude, thus increasing the participants' predisposition toward teaching writing as a process approach?

Method

The subjects for this study were 79 writing teachers, elementary through college, in metropolitan Atlanta schools and colleges. The subjects ranged in age from 25 to 55 and were predominantly white and female. Approximately 40% of the subjects were secondary school teachers, 35% were elementary teachers, and the remaining 25% were divided equally among middle school and college teachers. These teachers participated in one of three writing workshops held during three consecutive summers. Respectively, 24, 40, and 15 participants comprised these workshps.

The format of all three workshops approximated the pattern established by the University of California, Berkeley/Bay Area Writing Project Guidelines (1977).

1. The workshop runs for five weeks, four days per week.

2. The morning sessions are planned around the presentations of the participants. There are usually two presentations each morning with time for discussion following each. Staff members

determine the order of presentations and help participants prepare their presentations. Topics vary, depending on the interests, needs, and knowledge of the participants. Topics not covered by the participants are addressed by the staff and outside consultants in some afternoon sessions. These include attention to at least the following subjects, which are considered basic for successful writing instruction: the composing process, syntax, sequencing student writing, small group techniques, and writing assignment.

3. The writing of participants falls into four broad categories: (a) writing as a part of the participant presentations; (b) writing in response to staff assignments, ranging from personal to analytical; (c) a personal position paper on writing and the teaching of writing; and (d) a curriculum project that participants prepare during the following academic year.

Formative feedback from the participants during the first summer workshop prompted staff members to initiate changes for the second workshop, scheduled for the following summer. These changes resulted in the application of two learning conditions to the workshop methodology which were not practiced in the first workshop.

1. Workshop topics were structured and sequenced according to a learning hierarchy. Topics were determined in advance and presentations were sequenced in regard to the knowledge, processes, and skills needed by the participants (a) to function effectively in the workshop, and (b) to teach writing and serve as a teacher/

consultant following the conclusion of the workshop (Boiarsky & Spanjer, 1982). A syllabus describing the performance outcomes informed the participants of the achievement expected.

2. Participants were required to develop and deliver their presentations using a DO-LOOK-LEARN approach. This approach requires that participants (a) engage in the specific method of teaching writing that is being presented, DO; (b) analyze the method and learning activity in relation to the assumptions and knowledge underlying the method, LOOK; and (c) identify the knowledge and skills learned and adapt these for their own use, LEARN (Hale & Spanjer, 1972). Participants demonstrated their understanding of the method presented by writing a lesson plan for use in their own classrooms.

The changes described above were retained for the third summer workshop and constitute the differences in treatment between the first and subsequent workshop groups.

Procedure

Subjects were administered a pretest approximately one month prior to attending the workshop and a posttest on the final day of the workshop. Parts I and II of Test B, "Attitude and Knowledge in Written Composition" from the battery of Illinois Tests on the Teaching of English (ITTE) were selected to assess the results of this study. The test is criterion-referenced, with Parts I and II

measuring attitude toward and approach to teaching composition. According to the test administrator's manual (Evans & Jacobs, 1972), Parts I and II of this test are based on descriptions of two hypothetical English teachers who have differing philosophical positions about teaching composition.

Teacher X tends to emphasize the structure of discourse and its rhetorical characteristics. Writing instruction is usually built around the modes of discourse--narration, description, exposition, argumentation--and the structure of the paragraph (topic sentence, body, concluding sentence) and practice in paragraph patterns (comparison and contrast, details, particular to general, etc.). Composition assignments usually emphasize exposition and argumentation, calling for the students to deal with abstract problems, literary analysis, and the like. This teacher emphasizes theme evaluation and revision by showing students weaknesses in the content and structure of their written drafts and by requiring them to make corrections. Teacher X believes students learn to write by being taught the characteristics of good writing and then practicing until they achieve these in their own writing.

Teacher Y tends to emphasize the process of composing, believing that writing is learned rather than taught and that students' power over language grows as they have meaningful experiences communicating their ideas to others. This teacher's assignments are likely to grow out of the student's own experiences,

and the writing will tend to be personal rather than expository or academic. Teacher Y emphasizes the invention stage of composition. The focus of Teacher Y is on content rather than structure and style, on the act of composing rather than the qualities of prose.

For scoring purposes, Parts I and II are combined, resulting in both X and Y scores for the test-taker. These X and Y scores reveal how closely the respondent's attitude and approach resemble the profiles of the hypothetical teachers. Since this study is concerned with changing teacher attitudes toward writing as a process, only Y scores were used to indicate changes.

Results

In order to investigate the differences among the three groups, as well as between the pretests and posttests, a two-factor repeated measures analysis of variance was performed. The between-subjects factor was year (Summers 1, 2, and 3), while the within-subjects factor was time of testing (pre or post). As described earlier, the ITTE served as the dependent variable in the study. Pretest means, posttest means, and standard deviations for the three groups are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Since the groups did not contain the same number of subjects, the assumption of equal variances was tested prior to the analysis of variance. This test revealed no significant difference among the variances. Both of the main effects were significant in the repeated measures analysis (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

However, to avoid any misinterpretation of the results, these significant main effects were ignored in favor of interpretation of the significant interaction effect which resulted. Therefore, the cell means were probed further by performing correlated sample t tests in order to compare the pretest and posttest means for each of the three groups. These tests of simple main effects (summarized in Table 3) resulted in only one significant difference, that between the pretest and posttest means of the second group.

Insert Table 3 about here

Discussion

The answers to the two questions this study intended to discover are (a) yes, under certain conditions workshop participants do significantly change their attitude toward teaching writing as a process approach; and (b) yes, the likelihood of change can be increased by modifying the workshop methodology.

The participants from the first summer workshop did not change their attitudes toward teaching writing as a process approach. Actually, the attitudes became more traditional, viewing writing in terms of structure, style, and quality of the product, and their resemblance to Teacher X increased. This trend was reversed with the application of the two learning conditions--structuring and sequencing the workshop topics according to a learning hierarchy, and using a DO-LOOK-LEARN methodology for the presentations.

Participants in the second summer workshop showed significant change in their attitudes toward Teacher Y, viewing writing more as a process of discovering and shaping meaning. Although there was not a significant increase in the posttest scores of the third workshop group, inspection of the means in Table 1 suggests the "ceiling effect" may have limited significant gains. Nevertheless, the change for this group was toward Teacher Y, thus implying that the intervening learning conditions influenced the participants' attitudes accordingly. The learning conditions facilitated the acquisition of prerequisite skills for mastering more complex

workshop behaviors, increased retention of the content, and enhanced transfer of these learnings to new situations.

The design of this study precludes arguing with certainty that the application of the two learning conditions was completely responsible for influencing the participants' attitudes toward teaching writing as a process approach. Other uncontrolled variables may have influenced the outcome. Thus, for this reason and assuming that attitudes are important a priori measures of a teacher's classroom behavior, other follow-up studies including replication of this study need to be conducted.

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Table 1

ITTE Pretest and Posttest Means and Standard Deviations

		Pretest		Posttest	
Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	24	40.88	6.33	38.33	12.70
2	40	36.30	8.15	42.42	10.34
3	15	45.53	6.45	47.20	6.91

Table 2

Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance of ITTE Scores

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between	78			
Year	2	851.66	425.83	3.49*
Ss/Groups	76	9265.43	121.91	
Within	79			
Testing	1	197.11	197.11	4.43*
Interaction	2	567.14	283.57	6.38**
Testing x Ss/Groups	76	3378.83	44.46	
Total	157			

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Table 3

Results of Tests of Simple Main Effects Comparing Pretest and Posttest Means

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	t	p
1	40.88	38.33	1.04	.311
2	36.30	42.42	4.84	.000
3	45.53	47.20	1.73	.106